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(Photo by Karen Reeves)

The Elmer Iseler Singers: Diverse voices on the Algonquin stage

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ARTS, CULTURE AND ENTERTAINMENT

BY THOMAS FLYNN

Diverse perspectives have always been central to the music of The Elmer Iseler Singers.



Founded in 1979 by the late Elmer Iseler and his partner Jessie, the choir has performed across Canada, winning awards including Junos and even receiving a Grammy nomination. This summer, they will make a stop at Huntsville's Algonquin Theatre on July 9th to share their distinct combination of voices.

Since 1998, the group has been led by Conductor and Artistic Director Lydia Adams. Starting off as a fan of the group, Adams says, "I came home for Christmas, and my mom said, 'Listen, you've got to hear the new choir.' The Elmer Iseler Singers had just been formed, and I heard that very first concert on CBC radio. Wow." She went on to meet Jessie and Elmer at the Nova

Scotia Coral Federation and built a friendship that would last for years.

With Adams at the helm, the group's passion for highlighting diverse voices only strengthened. A key initiative on this mission is the group's work with indigenous peoples across Canada. Their first foray into working with indigenous peoples was their performance of the very first opera in the Cree language for the indigenous community in Moose River, a town just north of James Bay.



Lydia Adams (Photo by Bo Huang).

Adams proudly remembers working with Dene elders in preparation for a concert in the Dene language at the 21st Century Festival of New Music. “We worked very hard with those elders to get the exact sound. There’s a difference between one comma and two commas,” said Adams, “but we were very proud that those elders wanted to record the Elmer Iseler Singers speaking and singing in the Dene language to take back to their town so the young people could hear how [their language] sounded.” There is no mistaking the passion that Adams has for this work as she speaks about the amazing experiences the group has had with indigenous peoples.

The group’s passion for social justice also extends to environmentalism through their concert series “The Earth Sings” and the sense of community within their organization.

Adams raves about the bonds they have created within their choir. From the audition, members of the group are expected to be not only amazing singers but also wonderful members of a team and people in general. "So there's standard musical things that we do [as a part of the audition], but beyond that, I mean, sometimes it's asking, you know, what sort of reading they're doing or what's on their agenda, what are they up to, do they have a curiosity for life, and really, do they have a real passion for choral music?"

The Elmer Iseler Singers are excited to bring their passion for choral music to Huntsville for their performance with The Bergmann Piano Duo, who, as Adams puts it, "will be playing one piano four hands for this performance."

The choir first met the duo while performing at the White Rock Concerts, of which the duo are artistic directors. The Bergmann Piano Duo and Elmer Iseler Singers have performed together in both BC and Ontario and will be performing for the first time together on the Algonquin stage this July.



The Elmer Iseler Singers are excited to return to the community spirit of Huntsville for the first time since 1997, when they performed on the old tennis courts at Grandview Resort. Jessie Iseler expressed her excitement about having some time on Main Street, bringing it up several times during my interview with her and Adams.

At their core, the Elmer Iseler Singers are a group of talented individuals who have a deep passion for choral music and want to share that passion with the world. After travelling from coast to coast and working on hundreds of different stages, the group still has a soft spot for the people of Huntsville. Tickets for the performance can be purchased at huntsvillefestival.ca or by calling 705-789-4975.



Elmer Isleler Singers in 1997.

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